

THE STATE
OF THE
BLESSED DEAD

HENRY ALFORD, D. D.

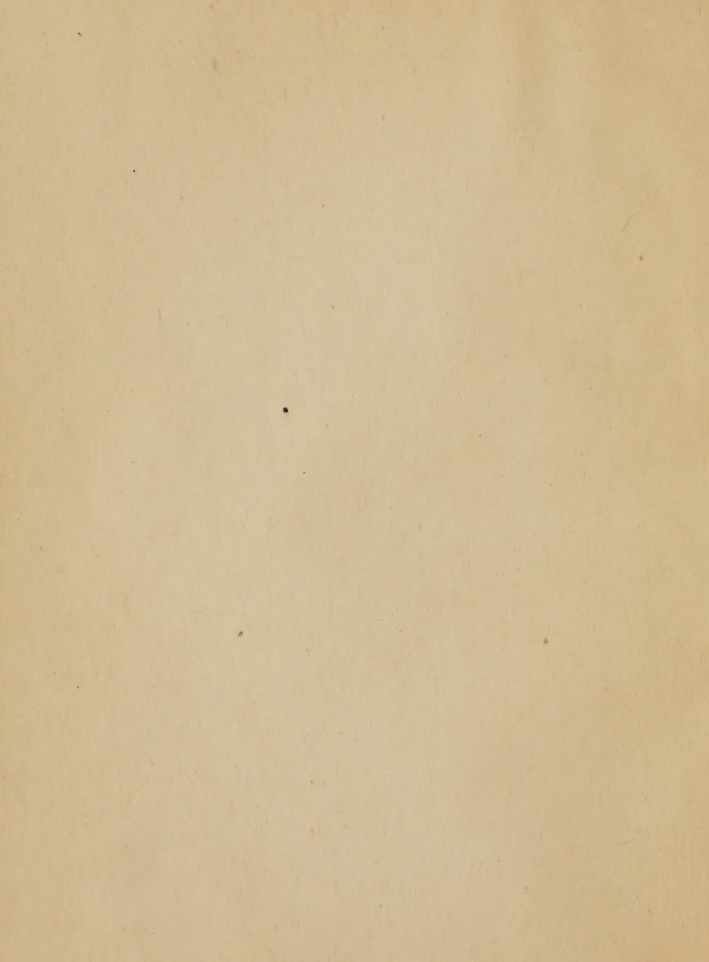
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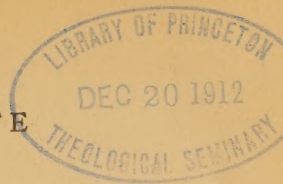
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THE STATE
OF THE
BLESSED DEAD.

BY
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LATE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

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THE STATE OF THE BLESSED DEAD.

I.



HAVE already announced that during this Advent season I would call your attention to the state of the blessed dead. My object in so doing is simply that we may recall to ourselves that which Scripture has revealed respecting them, for our edification, and for our personal comfort. And I would guard that which will be said by one or two preliminary observations.

With Death as an object of terror, with

Death from the mere moralist's point of view, as the termination of human schemes and hopes, we Christians have nothing to do. We are believers in and servants of One who has in these senses abolished Death. Our schemes and hopes are not terminated by Death, but reach onward into a state beyond it.

Again, with that state beyond, except as one of blessedness purchased for us by the Son of God, I am not at present dealing. It is of those that die in the Lord alone that I speak.

And this being so, it is clear that the first point about them demanding our attention, is, the very commencement of their state at the moment of death. And this will form our subject to-day.

We shall be guided in its consideration by two texts of Holy Scripture. The one is that where our Lord answers the prayer of the dying thief that He would remember him when He came into His kingdom, Luke xxiii. 43: "VERILY I SAY UNTO THEE, TO-DAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

And the other is an expression of St. Paul, Phil. i. 23, not improbably taken from those very words recorded in the gospel of that evangelist who was his companion in travel—"TO DEPART AND TO BE WITH CHRIST."

Now in both these one fact is simply declared, viz.: that the departed spirit of the faithful man is WITH CHRIST. It is as if one bright light were lifted for us in the midst

of a realm brooded over by impenetrable mist. For who knows whither the departed spirit has betaken itself when it has left us here? One of the most painful pangs in bereavement by death is the utter and absolute severance without a spark of intelligence of the departed. One hour, life is blest by their presence: the next, it is entirely and forever gone from us, never to be heard of more. One word, one utterance — how precious in that moment of anguish do we feel that it would be! But we are certain it never will be granted us. None has ever come back who has told the story. Where the spirit wakes and finds itself,—this none has ever declared to us; nor shall we know until our own turn comes. Now, in such a state of uncertainty,

these texts speak for us a certain truth:
The departed spirit is WITH CHRIST.

I shall regard this revelation negatively and positively : as to what it disproves, and as to what it implies.

First, then, it disproves the idea of the spirit passing at death into a state of unconsciousness, from which it is to wake only at the great day of the resurrection. If it is to be with Christ, this cannot be. Christ is in no such state of unconsciousness ; He has entered into His rest, and is waiting till all things shall be put under His feet ; and it would be a mere delusion to say of the blessed dead that they shall be with Christ, if they were to be virtually annihilated during this time that Christ is waiting for His kingdom. Besides, how then would the

Lord's promise to the thief be fulfilled? What consolation would it have been to him, what answer to his prayer, to be remembered when Jesus came into His kingdom, if these words implied that he should be unconsciously sleeping while the Lord was enjoying His triumph? Therefore we may safely say, that the so-called "sleep of the soul," from the act of death till the resurrection, has no foundation in that which is revealed to us.

It is perfectly true that the state of the departed is described to us as "sleeping in Jesus," or rather, for the words are a misrendering, a having fallen asleep *through*, or *by means of* Jesus. But our texts are enough to show us that we must not take such an expression for more than it really implies.

Sleeping, or falling asleep, was a name current among Jews and Christians, and even among the best of the heathens, for death, implying its peace and rest, implying also that it should be followed by a waking: but apparently with no intent to convey any idea of unconsciousness. It is a term used with reference to us, as well as to the dead. To us, they are as if they were asleep: removed from us in consciousness, as in presence. The idea also of *taking rest* tended to make this term appropriate. But it must not be used to prove that to which it evidently had no reference.

The spirit, then, of the departed does not pass into unconsciousness. What more do we know of it? It is WITH JESUS.

We have now to consider what this im-

plies. And in doing so we shall have further to make certain that which we think we have already proved. For, first, it clearly implies more than a mere expression of safe-keeping or reserve for a future state of blessedness. "The righteous souls are in the hand of God, and there shall no harm happen to them." This is one thing: but to be with Christ is another. We might again appeal to the spirit of the promise made to the penitent thief in order to show this: we might remind you that in the other text St. Paul is comparing the two states—life in the midst of his children in the faith, and death; and he says, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better:" better than being with you, my Philippians.

So that more must be meant than mere safe-keeping in the Redeemer's hands. We may surely say that nothing less than conscious existence in the presence of Christ can be intended. And if that is intended, then very much more is intended also than those words at first seem to imply. Remember the contrast which this same Apostle elsewhere draws. "We know," he says, "that while we are present in the body, we are absent from the Lord: for we walk by faith, not by appearance: we are willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord." That is, if we follow out the thought, this present state of dwelling in our home, the body, is a state of severance from the Lord; but there is a better state, into which we shall be introduced

when this house of the body is pulled down : and from the context in that place we may add, much as we wish to be clothed upon with our new and glorious body which is from heaven, yet even short of that we have learned to prefer being simply unclothed from the body, because thus we shall be present with the Lord.

So that we may safely assume thus much, my brethren : that the moment a Christian's spirit is released from the body, it does enter into the presence of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, in a way of which it knows nothing here : a way which, compared to all that its previous faith could know of Him, is like presence of friends compared to absence.

Now let us take another remarkable pas-

sage of Holy Writ bearing on this same matter. St. John in his First Epistle says: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it never yet was manifested what we shall be; but if it should be manifested, we know that we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is:" for this is the more accurate rendering of the words: meaning, if any one could come back, or come down, to us, and tell us what our future state is to be, the information could amount for us now only to this, that we shall be like Him, like Christ; because we shall see Him as He is. And in treating these words at considerable length last year, I pressed it on you that this concluding sentence might bear two meanings; either, we shall be like Him, *because in order to see Him as He is, we MUST be like*

Him ; or, we shall be like Him, because the sight of Him as He is will change us into His perfect likeness. For our present purpose, or indeed for any purpose, it matters little which of these meanings we take. At any rate, we have gained this knowledge from St. John's words, that the sight of the Blessed Lord which will be enjoyed by the Christian's spirit on its release from the body, will be accompanied by being also perfectly like Him.

Now, here, my brethren, are the elements of an immediate change, blessed and joyous beyond our conception. Let us spend the rest of our time to-day in dwelling upon it.

And I will not now insist on the deliverance of the spirit from the infirmity, or pain, or decay of the body : because this is not

so in all cases. Many a Christian's spirit is set free from a body in perfect vigor and nealth. Let us take nothing but what is common to all who believe.in and serve the Lord. Now what is our present state with reference to Him whom all Christians love? It is absence. And it is absence aggravated in a way that earthly absence never is. For not only have we never seen Him, which is a case perfectly imaginable in earthly relations, but also, which hardly is, we have no absolute proof of His existence, nor of His mind towards us. Even as far as this, is matter of faith, and not of appearance. We have no token, no communication, from Him. I suppose there hardly ever was a Christian yet, living under the present dispensation, entirely dependent upon his faith,

who has not at some time or other had the dreadful thought cross his mind—overborne by his faith, but still not wholly extinguished, “What if it should not be true after all?” And much and successfully as we may contend with these misgivings of unbelief, yet that frame of mind which is represented by them, that wavering, fitful, unsteady faith, ever accompanies us. The distress arising from it is known to every one who has the Christian life in him. Only those never doubt who have never believed: for doubt is of the very essence of belief. But some poor souls are utterly cast down by the fact of its existence—shrink from these half-doubting fits as of themselves deadly sin, and are in continual terror about their soul’s safety on this account: others, of stronger

minds, regard them truly as inevitable accompaniments of present human weakness, but of course struggle with them, and evermore yearn to be rid of them.

Now if what we have been saying be true—and I have endeavored not to go beyond the soberest inferences from the plain language of Scripture—if so much be true, then the moment of departure from the body puts an end forever to this imperfect, struggling, fitful state of faith and doubt. The spirit that is but a moment gone, that has left that well-known, familiar tabernacle of the body a sudden wreck of inanimate matter, that spirit is with the Lord. All doubt, all misgiving, is at an end. Every wave raised by this world's storms, this world's currents of interest, this world's rocks and

shallows, is suddenly laid, and there is a great calm. Certainty, for doubt; the sight of the Lord, for the conflict of assurance and misgiving; the face of Christ, for the mere faith in Christ—these have succeeded, because the departed spirit is “with the Lord”—companying with Him.

Before we follow out this farther, let us carefully draw one great distinction. We must not make the too common mistake of confusing this sight of the Lord which immediately follows on the act of death, with that complete state of the glorified Christian man, of which we shall have to speak in a subsequent sermon. Though greater than our thoughts can now conceive, the bliss of which we are speaking to-day is incomplete. The spirit which has been set free from the

body is alone, and without a body. This is not the complete state of man. It is a state to us full of mystery—inconceivable in detail, though easily apprehended as a whole. We must take care, in what we have further to say, that this is fully borne in mind. And, bearing it in mind, let us proceed.

This sight of Christ, this calm of full, unbroken assurance of His nearness and presence, what does it further imply? As far as we can at present see, certainly as much as this; First, the entire absence of evil from the spirit. It would be impossible to be with Christ in any such sense, unless there were entire agreement in will and desire with Him. It would be impossible thus to see Him as He is without being like Him.

Let us imagine, if we can, the effect of the total extinction of evil in any one of our minds. How many energies, now tied and bound with the chain of sin, would spring upward into action! How many imprisoned yearnings would burst their bonds, and carry us onward to higher degrees of good! And all these energies, all these yearnings, can exist in the disembodied spirit. It is in a waiting, a hoping state: the greater the upward yearnings, the greater the accumulated energies for God and His work, the higher will be the measure of glory to be attained after the redemption of the body, and the completion of the entire man.

Well—as another consequence, following close on the last, all *conflict*, from that same moment, is at an end. Conflict is ordained

for us, is good for us, now. If it were to cease here below, we should fall back. We have not entered into rest; it would not be good for us to enter into rest, in our present state. Here, this little platform, so to speak, of our personality, is drawn two ways, downward and upward: and it is for us who stand thereon to keep watch and ward that the downward prevail not; but from that moment the dark links of the downward chain will have been forever severed, and the golden cord that is let down from the Throne will bear us upward and onward, unopposed. So that, as to conflict, there will be perfect rest.

And let us remember another matter. If the departed spirit were during this time dwelling on its own unworthiness, casting

back looks of self-reproach, weighing accurately God's mercies and its own requitals during life past, there would of necessity be conflict: there would be bitter self-loathing, there would be pangs of repentance. It would seem, then, that during the incomplete and disembodied state, this is not so; but that all of this kind is reserved for a day when account is to be given in the body of things done in the body: and we shall see, when we come to treat of that day specially, how its accounts will be, for the blessed dead, itself made a blessing.

Again, as all evil will be at an end, and all conflict—so will all labor. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labors." Now labor here is a blessing, it

is true : but it is also a weariness. It leads ever on to a greater blessing, the blessing of rest. Christ has entered into His rest ; and the departed spirit shall be with Christ ; faring as He fares, and a partaker of His condition. Any who have lived the ordinary term of human life in God's service (for it is only of such that we are now speaking) can testify how sweet it is to anticipate a cessation of the toil and the harassing of life : to be looking on to keep the great Sabbath of the rest reserved for the people of God. What more may be reserved for us in the gloriuous perfect state which shall follow the resurrection, **is another** consideration altogether : but it clearly appears that the intermediate disembodied state is one of rest.

And let none cavil at the thought, that thus Adam may have rested his thousands of years, and the last taken of Adam's children only a few moments. Time is only a relative term, even to us. A dream of years long may pass during the sound that awakens a man ; and a sleep of hours appears but a second. What do we know of time, except as calculated by earthly objects? Day and night, the recurrence of meals—these constitute time to us : shut up a man in darkness, and administer his food at irregular intervals, and he loses all count of time whatever. Surely, then, no cavil on this score can be admitted. In that presence where the departed spirits are, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Let us conclude with a consideration, to a Christian the most glorious of all. The spirit that is with Christ in nearest presence and consciousness knows Him as none know Him here. Here, we speak of His purity, His righteousness, His love, His triumph and glory, with miserably imperfect thoughts, and in words still more imperfect than our thoughts. We are obliged to employ earthly images to set forth heavenly things. The revelations of Scripture itself are made through a medium of man's invention, and are bounded by our limited vocabulary. But then it will be so no longer. The Apostle compares our seeing *here* to that of one who beholds the face of his friend in a mirror of metal, sure to be tarnished and distorting : and our vision *there* to beholding

the same face to face—the living features, the lips that move, the eyes that glisten. That spirit which has but now passed away knows the love that passes our knowledge; contemplates things which God has prepared for them that love Him, such as eye has never seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Therefore, beloved, let us be of good cheer concerning them that have fallen asleep through Jesus: and let us be of good cheer respecting ourselves. Good as it is to obey and serve God here, it has been far better for them to depart and to be with Christ; and it will be far better for us, if we hold fast our faith and our confidence in Him firm unto the end. If to us to live is Christ, then to us to die will be gain.

II.

WE stand to-day at this point in our consideration of the state of the blessed dead. They depart, and are with Christ. "This day," the day of the departure, they are consciously, blissfully, in His presence. Their faith is turned into sight: their misgivings are changed for certainty: their mourning for joy. Yet, we said, their state is necessarily imperfect. The complete condition of man is body, soul, and spirit. The former of these three, at all events, is wanting to the spirits and souls of the righteous. They are in a waiting, though in an incon-

ceivably blissful, state. Of the precise nature of that state—of its employments, if employments it has, we know nothing. All would be speculation if we were to speak of these matters.

Our concern to-day is with the termination of that, their incomplete condition. When shall it come to an end? We have this very definitely answered for us by St. Paul, in a chapter of which we shall have much to say, and in a verse of that chapter which we will take for our text, I Cor. xv. 23. Notice, he is speaking of the resurrection of the dead: and he says, "But EVERY ONE IN HIS OWN ORDER: CHRIST THE FIRST-FRUIITS: AFTERWARD THEY THAT ARE CHRIST'S AT HIS COMING."

Well then: from these words it is clear

that the end of the expectant state of the blessed dead, and the reunion of their spirits with their risen bodies, will take place AT THE COMING OF CHRIST. Here at once we are met by a necessity to clear and explain that which these words import. In these days, it is by no means superfluous to say that we Christians do look forward to a real personal coming of our Lord Jesus Christ upon this our earth. I sometimes wonder whether ordinary Christian men and women ever figure to themselves what this means. I suppose we hardly do, because we fancy it is so far off from ourselves and our times, that we do not feel ourselves called upon to make it a subject of our practical thoughts. To this we might say, first, that we are by no means sure of this: and then, that even

if it were true, the interest of that time of His coming for every one of us is hardly lessened by its not being near us, seeing that if we be His, it will be, whenever it comes, the day of our resurrection from the dead. It is evidently the duty of every Christian man to make it part of his ordinary thoughts and anticipations—that return of the Lord Jesus from heaven, even as He was seen to go up into heaven. Now, our object to-day is to ascertain how much we know from Scripture, without indulging in speculations of our own, about this coming, and this resurrection which shall accompany it. The latter of these two we made the subject of a sermon a very few Sundays ago; but it was not so much with our present view, as to lay down the hope of resurrec-

tion as an element among the foundations of the Christian life.

Now one of the first and most important revelations respecting this matter is found in the fourth chapter of I Thess., ver. 13-18. These Thessalonians had been, as we learn from the two epistles to them, strangely excited about the coming of the Lord's kingdom. Perhaps the Apostle's preaching among them had taken especially this form ; for he was accused before the magistrates of saying that there was besides or superior to Cæsar another king, one Jesus. And in this excitement of the Thessalonians, fancying as they did that the Lord's coming would come in their own time, they thought that their friends who through Jesus had died a happy death were losers by not having lived

to witness the Lord's coming. Indeed, they sorrowed for them as those that had no hope: by which expression it seems likely that they even supposed them to be altogether cut off from the benefits and blessedness of that coming by not having been able to see it in the flesh. Thereupon St. Paul puts them right by saying—using the same argument as in that great resurrection chapter, 1 Cor. xv.,—that “*if we believe that Jesus Himself died and rose again, even so also those who through Jesus have fallen asleep will God bring with Him,*” that is, will God bring back to us when He brings back to us Jesus.

You may just observe, by the way, that the whole force of what the Apostle says is very commonly lost, by a wrong

method of reading these words. We very commonly hear them read, "will God bring *with* him." But thus we, as I said, lose the force of the argument, which is: If Jesus, our first-fruits, our representative, died and rose again, so will all who die in union with Jesus rise again. And in order to that, the same power of God which brings Jesus back to us, will with Him, with Jesus, bring their spirits back, in order to that resurrection.

Well, what then? "*This we say unto you by the word of the Lord*"—thus the Apostle introduces, not an argument, not a command or saying of his own, but a special revelation—"that we, which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" (for notice that at first, at the early time when these Thessa-

lonian epistles were written, first of all St. Paul's letters, the Apostle looked forward to that day of which neither man nor angel knoweth, as about to come on in his own time) shall have no advantage, no priority, over them which have fallen asleep. And why? For this reason—that “*the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first:*” that is, shall rise before anything else happens—any changing, or summoning to the Lord, of us who are alive.

Now here let us pause in the sacred text, and consider what it is which we have before us. Mind, we are speaking to-day as the Apostle is speaking in this passage, en-

tirely of the blessed dead ; of those of whom it may be said that through Jesus their death is but a holy sleep. We have clearly this before us : at a certain time, fixed in the counsels of God, the Father, known to no created being—mysteriously unknown also, for He Himself assures us of this in words which no ingenuity can explain away, to the Son Himself in His state of waiting for it—at that fixed time the Lord, that is Christ, shall appear in the sky, visible to men in His glorified body ; and His coming shall be announced to men by a mighty call, a signal cry, and by the trumpet of God.

Now let me at once say that as to such expressions as this, when we are told that they cannot bear their literal meaning, but are only used in condescension to our human

ways of speaking, and thus an attempt is made to deprive them in fact of all meaning, I do not recognize any such rule of interpretation. If the *words* are used to suit our human ways of thinking, I can see no reason why the *things signified* by those words may not also be used to affect our senses, which will be still human, when the great day comes. As to the sound being heard by all, or as to the Lord being seen by all, I can with safety leave that to Him who made the eye and the ear, and believe that if He says so, He will find the way for it to be so.

Now let us follow on with the description. With the Lord Jesus accompanying Him, though unseen to those below on the earth, will be the myriads of spirits of the blessed dead. And notice—for it is an importan

point, since Holy Scripture is consistent with itself in another place on this matter—that at this coming none are with the Lord, no spirits of the departed, I mean, except those of the blessed dead. In other words, this is not the general coming to judgment, when the whole of the dead shall stand before God, but it is that first resurrection of which the Evangelist speaks in the Apocalypse, when he says, chap. xx. 5, “*The rest of the dead lived not again until* (a prescribed time which he mentions, whatever that may mean) *the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ.*”

Then, the Lord being still descending

from heaven and on the way to this world, the dead in Christ shall rise first—the first thing: the grave shall be opened, and the bodies of the saints that sleep shall come forth, and, for so the words surely imply, their spirits, which have come with the Lord, shall be united to those bodies, each to his own.

Here, again, I can see no difficulty. The same body, even to us now on earth, does not imply that the same particles compose it. And even the expression “the same body” is perhaps a fallacious one. In St. Paul’s great argument on this subject in 1 Cor. xv. he expressly tells us, that it is not that body which was sown in the earth, but a new and glorified one, even as the beautiful plant, which springs from the insignifi-

cant or the ill-favored seed, is not that which was sown, but a body which God has given. Whatever the bodies shall be, they will be recognized as those befitting the spirits which are reunited to them, as they also befit the new and glorious state into which they are now entering.

This done, they who are alive and remain on earth, having been, which is not asserted here, but is in 1 Cor. xv., changed so as to be in the image of the incorruptible, spiritual, heavenly, will be caught up together with the risen saints in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: to *meet* Him, because He is in His way from heaven to earth, on which He is about to stand in that latter day.

Thus, then, the words which I have


chosen for my text will have their fulfillment. Christ has been the first-fruits of this great harvest—already risen, the first-born from the dead, the example and pattern of that which all His shall be. This was His order, His place in the great procession from death unto life ; and between Him and His, the space, indefinite to our eyes, is fixed and determined in the counsels of God. The day of His coming hastens onward. While men are speculating and questioning, God's purpose remains fixed. He is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness. His dealings with the world are on too large a scale for us to be able to measure them, but in them the golden rule is kept, every one in his own order. Christ's part has been fulfilled. He was

seen alive in His resurrection body ; He was seen taking up that body from earth to heaven. And now we are waiting for the next great event, His coming.

Wisely has the Church set apart a season in every year in which this subject may be uppermost in our thoughts. For there is nothing we are so apt—nothing, we may say, that our whole race is so determined to forget and put out of sight. It is alien from our common ideas, it ill suits our settled notions, that the personal appearing of Him in whom we believe should break in upon the natural sequence of things in which we are concerned. And the consequence is that you will hardly find, even among believing men, more than one here and there who at all realizes to himself, or has any

vivid expectation of, this personal coming of Christ. Think of the Christian Church as taking its faith and hope from the New Testament; and then compare that faith and hope, as it actually exists with reference to this point, with the New Testament—and the discrepancy is most remarkable. In the days when it was written, eighteen hundred years ago, every eye was fixed on, every man's thought was busy about, the coming of the Lord. You will hardly find a chapter in the epistles in which it is not spoken of, or alluded to, with earnest anticipation and confidence. Whereas now, when it is brought so much nearer to us, it has almost vanished out of the consideration of the Church altogether. No doubt something may be said by way of reason why it should

occupy a less prominent place in our thoughts than it did in theirs. The Lord's own words, and those of the Divinely-commissioned messengers who announced His return, spoke of it simply as certain, without any note of time being attached. Hence, those who had seen Him depart believed that they themselves should behold Him returning. There can be no doubt in any fair-judging mind that, besides these eye-witnesses, St. Paul, when he wrote that fifth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, had a full persuasion that he himself should be of those on whom the house not made with hands, that is to be brought from heaven, was to be put, without his being unclothed from the earthly tabernacle. He looked at such unclothing in his own



case as possible, but was confident that it would not happen so. And again, when, in the over-zeal of the Thessalonians, they imagined that the coming of the Lord was actually upon them, and he in his Second Epistle checks and sets right that premature assumption, he does so in words which, as he wrote them, might very well have had all their fulfillment within the life-time of man. Those words now appear to us in more of the true sense in which the Spirit, who spoke by Paul, intended them: we see that the apostasy there predicted, and the man of sin there set down as to be revealed, are great developments or concentrations of the unbelief of churches and nations; but there is no evidence that the men of that day saw any such meaning in the words. As it

was gradually, and not without conflict of thought, revealed to Peter and his side of the apostolic band, that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs and partakers of the peace of Christ, so it was gradually, and not without some sickness of hope deferred, made manifest to the Church that the coming of the Lord should be for ages and generations delayed. Unmistakable indications of this truth appear in the Lord's own prophetic discourses, which we know how to interpret.

And all this is no doubt a reason why the great subject should be less constantly and less vividly before our minds than it was before theirs. But it is no reason why it should have dropped out altogether; none, why we should almost universally neglect

the revelations of Scripture respecting the manner and details of His coming, and confuse them altogether in a vague popular idea of the judgment-day; none, why we should forget the mention of the landmarks which He Himself has pointed out along the wilderness journey of His Church,—and so, as far as in us lies, provide for her being unprepared when He appears.

The end of the state of waiting of the blessed dead, the end of our present state of waiting, will be that day of His appearing. Let us fix this well in our minds; and do not let us be kept from doing so by being told that there is danger in allowing the fancy to exercise itself on the unfulfilled prophecies. No doubt there is. But I am not exhorting you to exercise your fancy on

them. Faith and fancy are two wholly distinct things. To my mind, there can be hardly anything more detrimental to the faith of the Church than always to be fitting together history and prophecy, magnifying insignificant present or past events into fulfillments of prophetic announcements. They who do this are forever being refuted by the course of things; and then they shift their ground, and come out as confidently with a new scheme, as they did before with their old one. Nothing can more tend to throw discredit on God's prophetic word altogether; and it is no doubt in part owing to such speculations that faith in the Lord's coming has become weakened among us. He H' himself has told us the great use of His announcements of the future. "*These things*

have I told you, that, when the time is come, ye may remember that I told you of them."

When and as each prophecy comes to its time to be fulfilled, just as the years of the captivity predicted by Jeremiah were interpreted by the Church in Babylon, so the Lord's predictions, and the predictions of His Apostles, will fall each into its place; and the Church, if she endure in faith and watchfulness, will stand on her look-out, and be prepared for the sign of His coming. . . .

Let us, my brethren, with regard to those who have left us in the Lord, Let us, with regard to ourselves and our own future, be ever looking for and hasting to that day of God; the day when that better thing which God hath provided for us shall be manifested,

and they with us shall be complete, who without us were not perfect.

And let us not be discouraged by unpromising signs, or by prevalent unbelief. Remember what our Master has said to us in the services of this day, "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My words shall not pass away."

III.

We have traced the condition of the blessed dead, from their departure and being with Christ, to the glorious day of the resurrection. Their spirits are safe in His keeping, till that day when He shall call their bodies out of the graves, and they shall be once more complete in manhood, body, soul, and spirit. And our present consideration is, What, in that resurrection, is the next thing which shall befall them? Now the best, because the most general, text on this matter is that in Heb. ix. 27, "IT IS APPOINTED

UNTO MEN ONCE TO DIE, BUT AFTER THIS
THE JUDGMENT."

You will see that here is enounced something common to our nature. We are all to die; we are all to be judged after death. And that this is really true of all, and not merely stated generally, to be met afterwards by especial exceptions, St. Paul shows, when he, speaking of things belonging entirely to his own practice, and his own justification before God, says, in 2 Cor. v.: "We labor, that whether present in the body or absent from the body, we may be accepted with Him. *For we must all be made manifest*" (there is nothing about *standing* in the original) "*before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that which he did,*

whether it be good or bad." You will see that here he expressly includes himself among those who are to be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Now perhaps you are wondering why I am accumulating this Scripture evidence to show a matter which seems to all so plain. But I have a sufficient reason. And that reason is, because in other passages of Scripture the blessed dead, or rather the believers in Christ, whether living or dead at that day, are spoken of as if they were not subjected to the general judgment of all, but passed into the glorious life without undergoing that judgment. Thus our Blessed Lord Himself, in John v. 24, says, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and*

cometh not unto judgment" (for that, and not "condemnation," is the word used by our Lord), '*cometh not unto judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.*' That would seem to mean that the faithful man has already passed over out of death, and all that belongs to death, sin, and guilt, and judgment, into life; and therefore when the judgment comes he can have no part in it, cannot come into it at all, because he is acquitted already through the faith in Him who bore his guilt and took away his sin. And similarly, again, a few verses further on, ver. 29, our Lord says, "*An hour cometh, in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the*

resurrection of judgment." That is, I suppose the one shall rise into eternal life—into the full bliss of the heavenly state, and the others into the condition, whatever it be, which the judgment shall decide. Of course I am fully aware that I have not quoted these texts as they are read in our English Bibles. The matter stands thus: the word which I have rendered "*judgment*" is the word always meaning judgment—the word occurring in the very next verse, where our Lord says, "*As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just;*" the word used also above in ver. 22, where He says, "*The Father committed all judgment unto the Son.*" In those two places, because there was no difficulty, our translators kept the word "*judgment.*" But in these other two which I have quoted, because

there was an apparent difficulty, they changed "*judgment*" in one verse into "*condemnation*," and in the other into "*damnation*," without any reason or right soever. Indeed, in the latter of the two passages, not only is this so, but the whole sense is broken up by their unfaithfulness, Our Lord having mentioned the resurrection of judgment, proceeds to vindicate the justice of that judgment: "*As I hear, I judge : and My judgment is just, because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me.*" So that the difficulty, which man's meddling with the Bible has tried to remove, does exist in the Bible as it came from God. And we must try to see through it, not to hush it up by being unfaithful to the plain language of our Lord.

Nor does it exist here only. Our Lord Himself has given us one great description of the final day of judgment, in His own discourses; and another by the pen of His beloved apostle. We will take the latter first, as being, for our present purpose, the fuller of the two: and we will show in what remarkable point the two agree. In Rev. xx. 4, a passage to which we made reference last Sunday, we find the first resurrection taking place, and the faithful dead rising to reign with Christ during a period known as a thousand years. And it is expressly said, "*The rest of the dead lived not till the thousand years were finished.*" Now, I am not here taking upon me to explain the meaning of this, but merely to insist on the fact that, whatever may be the

precise import, it is so stated. Well, and what then? When the thousand years are expired, and when the last great victory of the cause of God over evil has been gained, then we read, "*And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it; and I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to his works.*" So far the description in the Revelation. Now, in that given us by our Lord in Matt. xxv. we find the Son of man coming in His Glory, and all

the holy angels with Him, and sitting on the throne of His glory, and all the nations gathered before Him. But there is this singular coincidence with the other account, that when the King comes to address those on the right hand and those on the left, He says, "*Inasmuch as ye did it (or did it not) unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it (or did it not) unto Me.*" Now "*these My brethren*" cannot of course mean the angels; therefore there must be some with Christ to whom the words must refer. In other words, we have here also the risen saints in glory with the Lord, as in that other account.

But we may go even further yet, and may discover more from Scripture respecting the position and employment of these the saints

who are with the Lord. When St. Paul, in 1 Cor. vi., is dissuading the Corinthians from taking their disputes before the heathen courts to be settled, he says, "*Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?*" and again, "*Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*" Such expressions as these can bear but one meaning, and that is, that the saints of Christ are actually to bear part in the judgment, as His assessors. Further than this we know not. It is not our duty to be wise above that which is written; but it is our duty to be wise up to that which is written: otherwise it was written in vain.

What, then, are we to say respecting this apparent discrepancy in the statements of Holy Scripture concerning the dead in Christ? If it be true that it is appointed

unto all men once to die, but after that the judgment; if it be true that we all, including even the apostles themselves, shall be manifested, laid open, before the judgment-seat of Christ, how can it be also true that the believer in Christ has already passed from death into life, and therefore cometh not into judgment at all? How can it be true that while others shall rise to a resurrection of judgment, he shall rise to a resurrection of life? How can those descriptions be correct which we have been quoting, of these living and reigning with Christ long before the general judgment, and even taking part in it with Him?

I believe the answer is not difficult, and perhaps may best be found by remembering another variety of expression in Scripture

respecting a kindred matter; I mean the way in which the saints of God are spoken of in relation to death itself. On the one hand, we know that it is appointed unto all men to die; and that the faith and service of the Lord bring with them no exemption from the common lot of all mankind. Not only is this proved every day before our eyes, but Scripture gives us its most direct testimony that those who believe in Christ must expect it. The very expressions, "*the dead in Christ*," "*those who through Jesus have fallen asleep*," show that this is so. Yet again, on the other hand, some passages would almost look as if death itself for the Christian man did not exist. Christ is said to have abolished death; we learn from His own lips that "if a man keep His word he

shall never taste of death ;” He has said again, “ He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.” Now in this case there is no practical difficulty, yet the variety of expression is very instructive. We all know what lies beneath it ; namely, the fact, that though the believer in Christ must undergo the physical suffering of death like other men, yet death has become to him so altogether without terror and curse that it has been for him deprived of real existence and power. The apostle in Rom. viii. gives the full explanation : “ *The body indeed is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness.*”

Well, now let us apply this to the case before us. Let us take the same solution, and see whether it will not suffice. The

Christian shall, like other men, undergo the judgment after death ; thus one set of Scripture declarations shall be fulfilled. But to the believer, who has died in the Lord, what is the judgment? He stands before the judgment-seat, perfect in the righteousness of Him to whom he is united, and from whom death has not separated him. His sentence of acquittal has been long ago pronounced ; he cometh not into judgment, so that it should have any substantial effect in changing or determining his condition. The resurrection is for him not a resurrection of judgment, not one in which the judgment is the leading feature and characteristic, but it is only and purely a resurrection of and unto life : one in which life is the leading feature and idea.

Thus for the blessed dead the judgment has no dark side: "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." But though it has no dark side, it has a bright one. Never for a moment do the Christian Scriptures lose sight of the Christian reward. Those who die in the Lord, like the rest of men, shall be laid open before the tribunal of Christ. Their sins have been purged away in his atoning blood; they have been washed and justified and sanctified in the name of Jesus and by the Spirit of their God.

But to what end? for what purpose? Was it merely that they might be saved? No indeed, but that God might be glorified in them by the fruits of their faith and love.

And these fruits shall then be made

known. The Father who saw them in secret shall then reward them openly. The acts done and the sacrifices made for the name of Christ shall then meet with glorious retribution ; yea, even to the least and most insignificant of them, even according to our Lord's own words—to the cup of cold water given to one of His little ones.

It is much the fashion, I know, in our days, to put aside and to depreciate this doctrine of the Christian reward. It looks to some people like a sort of reliance on our own works and attainments ; and so, though they may in the abstract profess a belief in it because it is in Scripture, they shrink from applying it in their own cases, or in those of others. Now, nothing can justify such a course. We have no right to

discard a motive held up for our adoption and guidance in Scripture. And that this is so held up, who that knows his Bible can for a moment doubt? Think of that saying of our Lord about the cup of cold water just quoted, think of the series of sayings of which it is the end, "*He that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward,*" etc. Think, again, of that series of commands, to do our alms; our prayers, our abstinences, in secret, each ending with, "*and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*" Think, again, of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, where the great final blessing at the hand of the Lord is throughout represented to us as reward, or rather—for so the word used properly means—wages

for work done. And it is in vain in this case to try to escape from the cogency of our Lord's sayings by alleging that the doctrines of the Cross were not manifested till after His death and glorification. For, if this were so, then the apostles themselves had never learned those doctrines. For the apostles constantly and persistently set before us the aiming at the Christian reward as their own motive, and as that which ought to be ours. Hear St. Paul saying that, if he preached the gospel as matter of duty only, it was the stewardship committed to him ; but if freely and without pay, a reward, or wages, would be due to him. Hear him again, in expectation of his departure glorying in the certainty of his reward

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my

course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day : and not to me only, but to all them also that love His appearing." Listen to St. John, whom we are accustomed to regard as the most lofty and heavenly of all the apostles in his thoughts and motives. What does he say* to his well-beloved Gaius? "*Look to yourselves, that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive the full reward."* Listen, again, to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that apostolic man, eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, and hear him describing the very qualities and attributes of faith, that he who cometh to God must *believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently*

seek Him, and saying of one of the first and brightest examples of faith, that *he had respect unto the recompense of reward.*

So, then, these holy dead who have died in the Lord will in that judgment have each his reward allotted to him, according to his service and according to his measure. Then the good that has been done in secret will all come to light. All mere profession, all that has been artificial and put on, will drop off as though it had never been; and the real kernel of the character, the fair dealing and charity and love of the inner soul, will be made manifest before men and angels. Then, not even the least work done for God and for good will be forgotten.

How such an estimate of all holy men will be or can be made and published, utter-

ly surpasses our present powers to imagine. We have no faculties now whereby to deal thus truly and fairly with all men: our organs of sense in this present state, and the minds themselves to which those organs convey impressions, are too feeble and limited for the effort required to apprehend all respecting all, as we shall then apprehend it. But this need not form any difficulty in our way to believe that such a thing shall be. The power to understand it and the power to receive it surely do not dwell farther off from our matured powers now, than the full powers of a grown-up man from the faculties and conceptions of a child. In all such matters we are children now. Think we then of the blessed dead at that day of the resurrection, as rising sure of bliss and of

their perfection in Him to whom they were united; being as though there were no judgment, seeing that they have One who shall answer for them at the tribunal: judged notwithstanding before the bar of God, and passing not to condemnation, but to their exceeding great and eternal reward.

One more thing only now is left us: to ask what we know of that last and perfected state of man—that highest development and dignity of our race, when body, soul, and spirit, freed from sin and sorrow, shall reign with Christ in light.

With that question, and its answer, we hope to conclude this course of sermons next Sunday.

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IV.

WE are to speak to-day of the final state of bliss of those who have died in the Lord. Their state of waiting has ended; the resurrection has clothed them again with the body, the final judgment has passed over them, and their last unending state has begun. There are no words in Holy Scripture so well calculated to give a general summary of that state as those concluding ones of a passage from which I have before largely quoted, 1 Thess. iv. 17: "AND SO SHALL WE EVER BE WITH THE LORD."

For these words contain in them all that has been revealed of that glorious state, included in one simple description. The bliss of the moment after death consisted in being with Christ: the bliss of unlimited ages can only be measured by the same. Nearness to Him that made us, union with Him who redeemed us, the everlasting and unvexed company of Him who sanctifieth us: what glory, what dignity, what happiness can be imagined for man greater than this?

And yet it is not by dwelling upon this, and this alone, that we shall be able to arrive at even that appreciation of heaven which is within our present powers. We may take these words, "forever with the Lord," and we may find in them, as in our Father's house itself, many mansions. In

various ways we are far from the Lord here in various ways we shall be near Him and with Him there.

But, first of all, we must approach these various mansions through their portals and the avenues which lead up to them. And one of those is the consideration, who, and of what sort, they shall be of whom we are about to speak. It will be very necessary that we should conceive of them aright.

Well, then, they will be men with bodies, souls, and spirits like ourselves. The disembodied state will be over, and every one will have been reunited to the body which he or she had before death. What do we know of this body? Very glorious thoughts rise up in our minds when we think of it; but in this course of sermons I am not specu-

iating; I am inquiring soberly what is revealed to us about the blessed dead. Well, then, again, what do we know of this body of the resurrection? In Phil. iii. 21, there is a revelation on this point. It is there said that "our home is in heaven, from whence also we expect the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change the body of our degradation that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory." And this change is very much dwelt on as a necessary condition of the heavenly state, in 1 Cor. xv. "*Flesh and blood*," we are told, *i.e.*, this present natural or physical body, the body whose informing tenant is the animal soul, *cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither can corruption*, that which decays and passes away, *inherit incorruption*, that state where

there is no decay nor passing away. So, then, a change must take place at the resurrection : a change which shall pass also on those who are alive and remain at the Lord's coming. The bodies of the risen saints, and of those who are to join them in being forever with the Lord, will be spiritual bodies : bodies tenanted and informed in chief by that highest part of man, which during this present life is so much dwarfed down and crushed by the usurpations of the animal soul ; viz., his spirit.

Now, it would be idle to conceal the fact, that we cannot form any distinct conception what this spiritual body may be. No such thing has ever come within the range of our experience. But some particulars we do know about it, because God has revealed

them. And of those, the principal are specified in this very passage: "*It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.*" It cannot decay. Eternal ages will pass over it, and it will remain the same. Again, "*It is sown in dishonor: it is raised in glory.*" There will be no shame about it, as there will be no sin. Thus much from these words is undoubted. What else they may imply we cannot say for certain; probably unimagined degrees of beauty and radiancy, for so the word glory as applied to anything material seems to imply. Further: "*It is sown in weakness: it is raised in power.*" That is, I suppose, with all its faculties wonderfully intensified, and possibly with fresh faculties granted, which here it never possessed and the mind of man could not even

imagine. This last also seems to be implied by its being called a spiritual body. As here it was an animal body, subject to the mere animal life or soul, hemmed in by the conditions of that animal life, so there it will be under the dominion of, and suited to the wants of, man's spirit, the lofty and heavenly part of him.

And if we want to know what this implies, our best guide will be to contemplate the risen body of our Lord, as we have it presented to us in the gospel narrative. As He is, so are we in this world in our essence even now; and as He is so shall we be entirely there. He is the first-fruits, we follow after as the harvest. What, then, was His resurrection body? While it was a real body and admitted of being touched and seen, and

had the organs of voice and hearing, yet it was not subjected to the usual conditions of matter as to its locomotion, or its obstruction by intervening objects. It retained the marks of what had happened before death. In order to convince the disciples of His identity, our Lord ate and drank before them. We must therefore infer that these were natural acts of His resurrection body, and not merely assumed at pleasure.

With a body, then, of this kind will the blessed be clothed upon at the resurrection and remain invested for ever in glory. Now let us see what further flows from this as an inference. We may further say, that we have implied in it a surrounding of external circumstances fitted to such a state of incorruptibility and glory. Man redeemed and

glorified will not be a mere spirit in the vast realms of space, but a glorious body moving in a glorious world. Nor is this mere inference, however plain and legitimate. Holy Scripture is full of it. The power of words does not suffice to describe the beauties and glories of that renewed and unfading world. I need not quote passage after passage—they are familiar to you all. Nor, again, is it nature alone which shall be glorious above all our conception here. It would appear that art also shall have advanced forward, and shall minister to the splendor of that better world. The prophets in the Old Testament, and the beloved apostle in the New, vie with one another in describing the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, adorned as a bride for

her husband, lighted by the glory of the indwelling Godhead.

Where this glorious abode of Christ and His redeemed shall be, we have not been told by revelation; and it were idle to indulge in speculation of our own. From some expressions in Scripture, it would seem not improbable that it may be this earth itself after purification and renewal: from other passages, it would appear as if that inference were hardly safe, and that other of the bodies in space are destined for the high dignity of being the home of the sons of God.

We have now, I believe, cleared the way for the answer to a question which presses upon us to-day: as far, at least, as that answer can be given on this side of death.

Of mankind in glory, thus perfected, what shall be the employ? For I need hardly press it on you that it is impossible to conceive of man in a high and happy estate, without an employment worthy of that estate, and in fact constituting its dignity and happiness.

Now, some light is thrown on this inquiry by Holy Scripture, but it must be confessed that it is very scanty. It is true that all our meditations on and descriptions of heaven want balance, and are, so to speak, pictures ill composed. We first build up our glorified human nature by such hints as are furnished us in Scripture: we place it in an abode worthy of it: and then, after all, we give it an unending existence with nothing to do. It was not ill said by a great preacher, that

most people's idea of heaven was to sit on a cloud and sing psalms. And others, again, strive to fill this out with the bliss of recognizing and holding intercourse with those from whom we have been severed on earth. And beyond all doubt such recognition and intercourse shall be, and shall constitute one of the most blessed accessories of the heavenly employment; but it can no more be that employment itself than similar intercourse on earth was the employment of life itself here. To read some descriptions of heaven, one would imagine that it were only an endless prolongation of some social meeting; walking and talking in some blessed country with those whom we love. It is clear that we have not thus provided the renewed energies and enlarged powers

of perfected man with food for eternity. Nor, if we look in another direction, that of the absence of sickness and care and sorrow, shall we find any more satisfactory answer to our question. Nay, rather shall we find it more difficult and beset with more complication. For let us think how much of employment for our present energies is occasioned by, and finds its very field of action in, the anxieties and vicissitudes of life. They are, so to speak, the winds which fill the sail and carry us onward. By their action, hope and enthusiasm are excited. But suppose a state where they are not, and life would become a dead calm; the sail would flap idly, and the spirit would cease to look onward at all. So that, unless we can supply something over and above the

mere absence of anxiety and pain, we have not attained to—nay, we are farther than ever from—a sufficient employment for the life eternal. Now, before we seek for it in another direction, let us think for a moment in this way. Are we likely to know much of it? We have before in these sermons adopted St. Paul's comparison by analogy, and have likened ourselves here to children, and that blessed state to our full development as men. Now ask yourselves, what does the child at its play know of the employments of the man? Such portions of them as are merely external and material he may take in, and represent in his sport: but the work and anxiety of the student at his book, and the man of business at his desk, these are of necessity entirely hidden from

the child. And so it is onward through the advancing stages of life. Of each of them it may be said, "We know not with what we must serve the Lord, until we come thither."

So that we need not be utterly disappointed if our picture of heaven be at present ill-composed: if it seem to be little else than a gorgeous mist after all. We cannot fill in the members of the landscape at present. If we could, we should be in heaven.

Remembering this our necessary incapacity for the inquiry, let us try to carry it as far as we may. And that we may not be forsaking the guidance of Holy Scripture for mere speculation, let us take the words of St. Paul, "*Now we see in a mirror, obscure-*

ly, but then face to face : now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I was known (by God)." This immense accession of light and knowledge must, of course, be interpreted partly of keener and brighter faculties wherewith the blessed shall be endowed; but shall it not also point to glorious employment of those renewed and augmented powers? How could one endowed with them ever remain idle? What a restless, ardent, many-handed thing is genius even here below! How the highly endowed spirit searches about and tries its wings, now hither, now thither, in the vast realms of intellectual life! And if it be so here, with the body weighing on us, with the clogs of worldly business and trivial interruption, what will it be there, where every-

thing will be fashioned and arranged for this express purpose, that every highest employment may find its noblest expansion without let or hindrance? Besides, think for a moment of the relative positions of men with regard to any, even the least, amount of this light and knowledge of which we are speaking. In order to take in this the better, think of the lowest and most ignorant of mankind who shall attain to that state of glory. Measure the difference between such a spirit and an Augustine, and then recollect that Augustine himself, that St. Paul himself, was but a child in comparison of the maturity of knowledge and insight which all shall there acquire. Such a thought may serve to show us what a gap must be bridged over, before any such perfect knowledge

will be attained by any of the sons of men. And when we remember that all blessings come by labor and the goodly heat of exercised energy, shall we deny to the highest of all states the choicest of all blessings? So that the attainment of, and advance in, the light and knowledge peculiar to that glorious land must be imagined as affording unending employment for the blessed hereafter. And this gives us another insight into the matter. As there is so great disparity among men here, so we may well believe will there be there. All Scripture goes to show that there will be no general equalizing, no flat level of mankind. Degrees and ranks as they now are, indeed, there will be none. Not the possession of wealth, not the accident of birth, which are

held here to put difference between man and man, will make any distinction there: but inequality and distinction will proceed on other grounds; the amount of service done for God, the degree of entrance into the obedience and knowledge of Him, these will put the difference between one and another there.

But we hasten to a close: and in doing so, we come back to the simple words of our text, "forever with the Lord;" and we would leave on your minds the impression that these, after all, furnish the best key to the employment of the blessed in heaven. If they are fit companions for the Lord, then must they be like Him as He is there; and thus we seem to have marked out an employment alone sufficient for eternity. Look at it in its various aspects.

What is, what will be, the Lord doing in that state of blessedness? Will He be idle, like the gods of Epicurus, sitting serene above all, and separate from all, created things? No, indeed, no such glorified Lord is revealed to us in Holy Scripture. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The created universe will be then as much beholden to His upholding hand as it is now. If they are to be forever with Him, attending and girding His steps, they, too, will doubtless be fellow-workers with Him there, as they were here. And in this, only consider how much of His creation was altogether hidden from them here! Look abroad on a starry night—behold a field of employment for those who shall be ever with the Lord. The greater part of His works never

came within sight of this our mortal eye at all. These are only hints, it is true, which we have no power of following out: but they may serve for finger-posts to point to whole realms of possible blessed employment.

Then, again, there is more in the words "forever with the Lord" than even this. Who can tell what past works, not of creation only, but of grace also, the blessed may have to search into—works wrought on themselves and others which may then be brought back to them by memory entirely restored, and then first studied with any power to comprehend or to be thankful for them?

Then, again, the glory of God Himself, then first revealed to them—the redeeming love of Christ—the glory of the mystery of

the indwelling of the Spirit—dry and lofty subjects to the sons of men here, will be to them when there as household words and as daily pursuits. It seems to me, my brethren, when we look at all these sources of blessed employment, though we are unable from our present weakness to follow them out into detail—and when we think that perhaps after all in our earthly blindness we may be omitting some which shall there constitute the chief, it seems to me, I say, as if we should have to complain not of insufficient employ for the ages of eternity, but of an infinite and inexhaustible variety, for which even endless ages of limited being hardly seem to suffice.

Such, then, beloved, are the thoughts which have occurred to us on a subject of which

I pray that it may be one of personal interest to every one here present.

When we are to leave this present state is a matter hidden from our eyes, and not dependent on ourselves: but how we will leave it, whether as the Lord's blessed ones, or with no part in Him, this is left for ourselves to determine. There is set before us life and death. May we choose life, that it may be well with us; that we may wake from the bed of death and find ourselves with the Lord; that we may pass in joyful hope through the waiting and disembodied state, and wake at the morning of the resurrection to that fullness of completed bliss of which we have this day been speaking.

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